

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A hydrogel having a floatability and having a thickening capability wherein the hydrogel thickens from 40% to 90% of an aqueous solution or suspension starting from the surface of the solution or suspension and the hydrogel thickens the rest of the solution or suspension starting from the bottom of a container for the solution or suspension, said hydrogel comprising superabsorbent polymer particles, coated with 0.05% to 1%, by weight, of a hydrophobic compound, wherein the hydrophobic compound is a hydrophobicized silica or a hydrophobicized mixture of silicas and aluminas, 0.05% to 4%, by weight, of a multivalent cation, and optionally a hydrophilic compound.

2. (Previously presented) The hydrogel of claim 1 having a solidification time of less than 120 seconds upon contact with the solution or suspension and/or having a blood absorbance of at least 10 g/g.

3. (Withdrawn) A process for preparing a hydrogel comprising aftertreating a dried hydrogel with a hydrophobic compound, and optionally a hydrophilic compound.

4. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 3 wherein the hydrophobic compound and optional hydrophilic compound are particles having an average diameter from 0.001 to 10 μm .

5. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 3 wherein the hydrophobic compound is a hydrophobicized silica or a hydrophobicized mixture of silicas and aluminas.

6. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 3 wherein the hydrophilic compound is a silica or a mixture of silicas and aluminas.

7. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 3 wherein the process is additionally aftertreated with a multivalent cation and an optional surfactant.

8. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 7 wherein the multivalent cation is an aluminum ion.

9. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 7 wherein the surfactant is a sorbitan ester.

10. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 7 wherein the multivalent cation is metered as an aqueous solution and the surfactant has an HLB value of less than 18.

11. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 3 wherein the aftertreated hydrogel is dried.

12. (Cancelled)

13. (Cancelled)

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Previously presented) A hygiene article comprising a hydrogel of claim 1, said hygiene article selected from the group consisting of an incontinence article, a napkin, a tampon, and a liner.

16. (Cancelled)

17. (Withdrawn) A method of absorbing blood, body fluids, or both comprising contacting the blood, body fluid, or both with a hydrogel of claim 1.

18. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 17 wherein the hydrogel is present in a hygiene article.

19. (Withdrawn) A method of thickening an aqueous solution or suspension comprising contacting the solution or suspension with a hydrogel of claim 1.

20. (Withdrawn) A method of thickening medical wastes comprising contacting the medical waste with a hydrogel of claim 1.

21. (Previously presented) A composition comprising a hydrogel of claim 1 and one or more of a biocidal material, an antimicrobial material, an antibacterial material, a perfume or scent material, a stabilizer, a dye, and a pH indicator.

22. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 4 wherein the hydrophobic compound is a hydrophobicized silica or a hydrophobicized mixture of silicas and aluminas.

23. (Withdrawn) The process of claim 4 wherein the hydrophilic compound is a silica or a mixture of silicas and aluminas.

24. (Previously presented) The hydrogel of claim 1 wherein the hydrophobic compound and the optional hydrophilic compound are particles having an average diameter from 0.001 to 10 μm .

25. (Cancelled)

26. (Previously presented) The hydrogel of claim 1 wherein the hydrophilic compound is a silica or a mixture of silicas and aluminas.

27. (Currently amended) The hydrogel of claim 1 wherein the hydrogel further comprises a ~~multivalent cation and an optional surfactant~~.

28. (Previously presented) The hydrogel of claim 1 wherein the multivalent cation is an aluminum ion.

29. (Previously presented) The hydrogel of claim 27 wherein the surfactant is a sorbitan ester.